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ABSTRACT

Previous research has emphasized the significant negative correlation between counselor effectiveness and dogmatism, or closemindedness. To reduce levels of dogmatism in counselor trainees, a program was developed and tested at Southwest Texas State University. The new course, "Guidance to Meet the Needs of Multicultural Students," gave counseling students the opportunity to learn counseling skills by observing and interacting with students from a local Job Corps Training Center. Tests showed that students who took the experimental course had significantly reduced dogmatism scores compared to the other students. Data confirmed that dogmatism is a mutable characteristic that can be significantly reduced. (JAC)

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REDUCING DOGMATISM AMONG UNDERGRADUATE COUNSELOR TRAINEES

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REDUCING DOGMATISM AMONG
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Statement of Problem

Several research studies have explored the relationship between counselors' personality characteristics and their effectiveness. An almost universal finding of such studies has been the significant negative correlation between counselor effectiveness and dogmatism or closemindedness (Kemp, 1961 and 1962; Millikin and Peterson, 1967; and Mezzano, 1969). Evidence from these studies suggests that less dogmatic counselor trainees are perceived by their supervisors as more empathic, authentic, and congruent in the counseling relationship. Contrawise, trainees who score higher on the dogmatism scale are judged as less accepting of their clients' behavior, less empathic, and less open.

The purpose of this study, then, was to develop a program for reducing the levels of dogmatism among undergraduate counseling students at Southwest Texas State University--a large teacher training institution situated in a rather conservative area of south central Texas.

Subjects

Subjects were students working toward the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degrees with a major or minor in Guidance Studies. The Guidance Studies Program also prepares students for certification as Guidance Associates by the Texas Education Agency. Graduates of this program can expect to be employed in educational, psychological, or sociological settings under the direct supervision of counselors, psychologists, personnel officers, social workers, and other qualified professionals holding

master's or doctor's degrees. Many graduates of the program can expect to find themselves working in multicultural settings; (Texas, for example, has one of the nation's largest populations of black and Spanish-speaking peoples).

Theoretical Framework

The reduction of dogmatism, it was realized, could not be accomplished through counselor education texts and university-based lectures alone--instead, students would need experiences similar to those they would encounter as counselors in multicultural settings. In response to this need, Southwest Texas State University developed a new counseling and guidance course, Guidance to Meet the Needs of Multicultural Students. This course gives students the opportunity to learn transcultural counseling skills by observing and interacting with students from local Gary Job Corps Training Center--a federally funded residential work-study program that serves black, Mexican-American, Laotian, Vietnamese, and anglo youth from urban and rural areas throughout the nation.

Methods and Procedures

The experimental group for this study was composed of sixteen students enrolled in Guidance to Meet the Needs of Multicultural Students during the spring 1981 semester. The control group consisted of twenty-six Southwest Texas counseling and guidance students not enrolled in the multicultural counseling course.

On a pre- and post-test basis, the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale, Form E (Rokeach, 1960) was administered to the students in both groups at the beginning and at the end of the semester. Rokeach contends that an individual operates from a set of "socio-politico-

personal-philosophical" convictions which he formulates in response to the world about him, and these convictions are relatively closed (dogmatic) or open (undogmatic) to modification or restructuring. All belief systems are further organized according to three major dimensions: a belief-disbelief dimension, a central-peripheral dimension, and a time perspective dimension. Items in the Dogmatism Scale are keyed to these three broad categories.

The Dogmatism Scale presents subjects with forty statements of social and personal beliefs. For each statement, subjects indicate whether they "agree very much" or "disagree very much" on a +3 to -3 scale. The total score on the Dogmatism Scale is the sum of scores obtained on all items after a constant of +4 is added to each item score. For the Dogmatism Scale, Form E, Rokeach reports corrected reliabilities ranging from .68 to .93.

Description of the Course

To prepare counseling students to work with individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds, the course has nine specific objectives. After the course, the student will have developed:

1. an increased ability to communicate with students from other cultures
2. skill in diagnosing the knowledge and abilities of students from other cultures
3. knowledge about the psychology and impact of prejudice
4. the ability to discover the differences between the value systems of different racial and class subcultures in the school setting and understand their effect on the counseling process
5. a deeper, more sensitive knowledge of one's own and other cultures

6. an increased capacity for humane, sensitive, and critical inquiry into multicultural issues as they relate to transcultural counseling

7. an increased willingness and openness to examine and reassess one's own cultural attitudes

8. increased communication skills for counseling multicultural students

9. an increased ability to respond positively and sensitively to a diversity of behavior involved in multicultural settings.

To achieve the foregoing nine objectives, the multicultural counseling students participate in the following activities designed to reduce dogmatism scores:

1. Observation visits to Gary Job Corps Training Center during which students participate in two-way rap sessions with Job Corps students.
2. In-class role playing of transcultural counseling sessions.
3. In-class discussions on the psychology and impact of prejudice, culminating in the examination and reassessment of one's own ethnocentric attitudes.
4. Structured group experiences and simulation exercises designed to enhance students' skills in transcultural communication.

Results and Conclusions

A *t* test for paired data was used to determine if there were significant differences between the dogmatism scores of the experimental and control groups at the start of the semester. This test failed to yield any significant differences ($p < .50$). Subjects' dogmatism scores at the end of the semester were again compared; this time, however, a significant difference was found

($p < .05$). Experimental group students, who began with a mean dogmatism score of 149.88, now had a mean score of 129.75. On the other hand, control group students began with a mean score of 156.96 and concluded the semester with a score of 155.42.

Educational Importance

The evaluation of pre-test and post-test data indicate that dogmatism is a mutable characteristic that can be significantly reduced in counselor trainees through their participation in specially designed preservice programs. Therefore, counselor training programs (whether they prepare counselors for multicultural settings or not) should try to implement the following recommendations:

1. Efforts should be made to assist the counselor-in-training to identify and to evaluate any dogmatic dimensions of his or her personality.
2. Counselor education programs should also include role playing and similar exercises which highlight how dogmatic attitudes impede the counseling process.
3. Counselor trainees should be encouraged to alter their dogmatic beliefs by instructors, or role models, whom they perceive as open, caring, non-threatening, and non-dogmatic.

NOTES

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